

THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

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“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.
For I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God.”

Acts 20:26-27, NKJV

From the Editor's Desk

DYLAN STEWART - 01 JANUARY 2024

It is with great joy we present the third edition of *The Whole Counsel of God*. We hope that as we approach this new year, we do so with hearts set on bettering ourselves as servants of our God and King. This past year was undoubtedly the most difficult and challenging year of my life. I do not expect those challenges to lighten up any time soon either, so I petition you to continually and fervently pray for me. Satan is busy and he is unrelenting.

In this month's bulletin, I have included a very lengthy article refuting the false doctrine known as "mental divorce." For those unaware, this doctrine attempts to redefine what the word "divorce" means. Proponents of "mental divorce" argue that when a person divorces his mate for a cause other than fornication, the divorce is not a "real" divorce and is unrecognized by God. The result of this doctrine allows an unjustly divorced person to discover that his former spouse cheated sexually during or after the marriage, and can, therefore, decide to "divorce" (not legally, but mentally) his spouse for the cause of adultery and thus be eligible to remarry. Since there is no legal way for a person to "divorce" his spouse in this manner, it is a mental act - i.e. "mental divorce." This doctrine is one that not only permeates the denominational world (at least the few denominations who strictly adhere to Jesus's general laws on marriage and divorce), but I have recently learned many gospel preachers who I know believe the scriptures authorize "mental divorce." As result, in an attempt to "*contend earnestly for the truth*" (**Jude 3**) with these brethren, I have included a very lengthy article showing by the scriptures how the false doctrine of "mental divorce" is just that - false. This doctrine must be refuted and uprooted because it gives false hope to adulterers.

I pray the "mental divorce" article, as well as everything else included in this edition of the journal will be spiritually beneficial to all who read it.

(DTS)

The Whole Counsel of God is published monthly by Dylan Stewart. All correspondences should be submitted via the **Contact Form** found [here](#).

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Hate Father and Mother

MIKE JOHNSON | ALABAMA, UNITED STATES

PUBLISHED MAY 2014 IN SEEKING THINGS ABOVE

Luke 14:26 says, “*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.*” Why does Christ say that we must hate our fathers and mothers and other family members? What does this verse mean?

There are occasions where the Bible uses the term “hate” in a comparative sense. **Gen. 29:31** is one example of this. This verse says that Jacob hated his wife, Leah. However, **verse 30** points out that it was a matter of him loving Rachel, his other wife, more than Leah. Thus, the word hate is used comparatively to mean “love more than.”

The verse in question, **Luke 14:26**, also uses the term “hate” in a comparative sense. Jesus is not saying we are to have malice or ill will toward our family. That idea would contradict other clear passages. Instead, Christ is saying that we must always put Him before our families. Our love for Christ is to be higher than our love for anyone or anything. **Matt. 10:37** helps to explain **Luke 14:26**. Here Jesus said, “*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.*”

In **Luke 14:26**, Jesus is speaking to multitudes and is trying to make them realize that following His way will not always be easy. There will be hardships, tribulations, and persecutions. He says that we must bear our cross (**v. 27**).

The lesson for us today is that we must always put Christ and His Word first in

our lives. We are to love Him more than any family relationship or material possession. Further, we show our love for Him as we obey His teachings. In **John 14:15**, he said, “*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*” Do you put Christ first, above any relationship or material possession?

ILLUSTRATIONS

**“He did not tell them anything without illustrating it with a story”
(Matt. 13:34b, GW)**

I read an article in my local newspaper written by an elderly woman titled, “Want to Stand Out? Wear a Hat.” In this article, the writer explains, “I wore a hat to my grandson’s wedding. I was the only woman to wear one . . . What happened to hats for formal, special occasions? Women seem to like the look but they don’t join in. They’d get plenty of attention . . . During the 40s and 50s, women wore hats to church, to school functions, to special parties, weddings, and funerals.” While reading this article, I thought of 1 Cor. 11:2-16. The author of the article mentioned women wearing fashionable hats being an oddity today, but if a Christian woman today wore the covering (“veil,” RSV) that God requires her to wear when she prays or prophesies, she will similarly stand out among her peers today. Ladies, do you want to stand out? Wear a veil. (DTS)

Refuting “Mental Divorce”

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The “mental divorce” position is one that exists not only among denominational believers, but even among members of the Lord’s church. In fact, the older I get and the more Christians I meet within the brotherhood, it seems the more people I discover who believe “mental divorce” is authorized by the scriptures. Just recently, for instance, I learned that a gospel preacher who I have known all my life is an advocate for “mental divorce.” After reaching out to him in hopes of setting up a public debate between him and another brother over the issue of “mental divorce,” I feel obligated to prove from the scriptures why this issue is so important.

WHAT IS MENTAL DIVORCE?

The doctrine of mental divorce attempts to redefine what the word “divorce” means. Proponents of this theory say that when a person divorces his mate for a cause other than fornication, the divorce is not a “real” divorce and is unrecognized by God. Note that we said unrecognized and not unauthorized. Both sides of the argument agree and realize that a divorce for any reasons besides fornication is unauthorized, but that is not the dividing issue. Mental divorce advocates contend that when one divorces his wife for a cause other than fornication, the divorce is not a “real” divorce because it is not for the cause of fornication. Therefore, God seemingly does not recognize the divorce. In other words, legal (civil) divorce means nothing in God’s sight, at least according to this teaching.

The result of this doctrine allows - AFTER a legal divorce is final - an unjustly divorced person to discover that his former

spouse cheated sexually during the marriage, and he can then decide to “divorce” (not legally, but mentally) his spouse for the cause of adultery. Since there is no legal way for him to do this, it is a mental act, thus the reason we call it “mental divorce.” This “divorce” supposedly is the “valid” divorce and the person, therefore, has the right to remarry after mentally divorcing the spouse, according to this doctrine.

DEFINING THE ISSUES

I want to be clear from the outset - the issue is not:

Is divorce for a reason besides fornication acceptable? Both sides of the argument, for the most part, are in agreement that no other reason is acceptable.

However, the issues/questions are:

- Disagreement over what divorce means.
- How a person can become eligible for remarriage, which involves accepting/denying whether civil law matters, and understanding if a divorce/putting away can occur after a legal (civil) divorce has occurred.
- Recognizing the distinction between “marriage” and the marriage “bond.”
- If mental divorce (mentally putting a spouse away after a civil divorce has already occurred) is not scriptural, this means God allows the innocent divorced party to be punished; how could He allow this?
- Is this a fellowship issue?

The scriptures provide definitive answers to each of these questions.

WHAT IS “DIVORCE?”

As already stated, the majority of people on both sides of the issue agree there is only one reason for divorce - fornication/sexual immorality.

- **Matt. 5:32** – “*But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.*”
- **Matt. 19:9** – “*And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.*”

The issue is understanding the meaning of “divorce.”

The word “divorce” in **Matt. 5:32** and **Matt. 19:9** is translated from the Greek word “apoluo” (also translated “put away” in the KJV). Apoluo has multiple meanings, but note these definitions:

- When speaking of a captive, “to loose his bonds” (Thayer).
- When speaking of the marital relationship, “used of divorce, to dismiss from the house, to repudiate” (Thayer).

Since “repudiate” is not a common word in our vocabulary (at least not mine), it is worthwhile to define. “Repudiate,” according to Webster, means “to reject as unauthorized or as having no binding force.” The Oxford Languages Dictionary defines “repudiate” as to “refuse to fulfill . . . an agreement, obligation, or debt.”

“Apoluo” in **Matt. 5:32** and **Matt. 19:9** is a different Greek word than what is used in **1 Cor. 7:10**, which reads, “*Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart [chorizo] from her husband.*”

“Chorizo” is, however, the same Greek word that appears in **Matt. 19:6**, where Jesus says, “*Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate [chorizo].*” Thayer defines “chorizo” as “to separate, divide, part, put asunder, to separate one’s self from, to depart.” So, “chorizo” can refer to marital separation or divorce. To be clear though, divorce is clearly under consideration in **1 Cor. 7:10-11**: “*Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart [chorizo] from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce [aphiemi] his wife.*” When a wife “departs” from her husband in this passage, she is told to remain “unmarried,” showing a divorce has occurred. Thayer defines “aphiemi” as “to send away; to bid going away or depart; of a husband divorcing his wife.” Divorce, then, or the termination of a marriage, is under consideration in **Matt 5:32, 19:9**; their parallel accounts; and **1 Cor. 7:10-11**.

Now, returning to our question - what is “divorce?” **Divorce is the termination of a marriage**, based on both the scriptural context of the verses in which the word “divorce” appears, as well as the definitions of “apoluo” and “aphiemi.”

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR REMARRIAGE?

When it comes to eligibility for remarriage after a divorce, the scriptures make the following distinctions.

It Matters WHY a Divorce Occurs

Looking again at **Matt. 5:32**, we read, “*But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.*” There is only one scriptural reason for divorce - a spouse cheats sexually. Note that remarriage is not even discussed in this

passage. So, divorce alone even without remarriage, if it occurs for *“any reason except sexual immorality”* is a sin. Additional details are added in **Matt. 19:9**: *“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”* Remarriage can only take place after a divorce **IF** that divorce occurs due to sexual immorality.

It Matters WHO Divorces Whom

In a parallel account of **Matt. 19:9**, the Holy Spirit records Jesus saying in **Luke 16:18**, *“Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery.”* **Matt. 5:32** and **Matt. 19:9** both say what this passage says: whoever marries a person who “is divorced” (on the receiving end of a divorce) commits adultery. So, it matters who does the divorcing. The innocent party has to be the one who divorces the sexually immoral person, and if such a divorce occurs, the innocent party is the only person eligible for remarriage. Of course, neither the person on the receiving end of an unscriptural divorce nor the person initiating such a divorce are eligible for remarriage. A wrongfully divorced person has no right to remarry just like the one who instigates a wrongful divorce.

It Matters WHEN a Divorce Occurs

This is where disagreement arises over the question of if civil law matters. As we will see from the scriptures though, civil law does play a part in this discussion, and the scriptures show that civil law establishes when a divorce occurs.

CIVIL LAW DOES MATTER

A well-known gospel preacher in North Alabama who is one of the regular gospel meeting preachers among churches

of Christ and is active in missionary work outside the country published the following statement in Guardian of Truth in 1992:

“Jesus presented the will of God in his teaching on marriage. He never referred to the operation of civil law as such in his teaching, but the operation of divine law, in regard to marriage, putting away, fornication, or adultery. Additional error is taught when the legal intricacies of civil law are imposed on the teaching of Jesus. While people should abide by civil law in this field if divine law permits, the procedures and operations of civil law do not determine what marriage is, what putting away is, what adultery is, or when any one of these has taken place. Only God’s will is decisive in any of these matters.”

NOTE: The brother who made these assertions is a gospel preacher who I have known my entire life. I reached out to this brother in October 2023 asking him to clarify his statement. He reiterated to me his belief that civil law does not determine the beginnings and endings of marriages. After privately refuting my good brother’s assertion, I asked him if he would be willing to publicly debate this subject. He declined to engage in a public debate and informed me he would cease discussing the issue any further with me.

First, let me say amen that only God’s will decides the truth on this and every other matter. However, although neither Jesus nor His apostles directly addressed civil law when explaining the New Testament law on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, when we rightly divide God’s Word, we can see how civil law clearly does play a part in this matter.

Civil Law During Biblical History

For context, it seems there was no ceremonial or legal requirement to get married

before the Law of Moses, such as in the days of Isaac. It is recorded, *“Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death” (Gen. 24:67)*. Since there appears to have been no legal requirement for marriage, evidently and consequently there also would have been no legal requirement at that time to divorce (if such even existed or if God permitted it). Incidentally, this may also still be the case in the most remote and “uncivilized” places in the world today. During the time of Moses, on the other hand, divorce did involve a legal process requiring a person to write a *“certificate of divorce”* to put away a spouse (**Deut. 24:1-4**). It appears to me that the same legal process was also still in place during Jesus’s day since in **Matt. 5:31** the Lord repeated this same legal process given in **Deut. 24:1**, and there would have been no need to repeat that process if the Jews were not still obligated to follow it. In our society today, both marriage and divorce require a legal process, and we are required to follow the laws of the land (**1 Pet. 2:13**, etc.). As it pertains to marriage, this means that couples desiring to marry must file a marriage certificate at the local courthouse, and a person desiring to divorce his spouse must also legally file to do so at the local courthouse. Both situations follow legal procedures.

Consequences of Denying Civil Law

You may be thinking, “Okay, what’s your point?” Well, if, as our brother and mental divorce advocates teach, “the procedures and operations of civil law do not determine what marriage is, what putting away is, what adultery is, or when any one of these has taken place,” then here are the consequences of such a doctrine:

- There is no need for a couple to legally file a certificate for marriage. They could just say mentally “we are married” and start living and sleeping together and there would be nothing wrong with it. That’s only logical if the procedures and operations of civil law do not determine when a marriage has taken place.
- If civil law does not determine when a putting away (divorce) has taken place, that would mean there would be no need for a couple to legally file for divorce. They could just say mentally “we are divorced,” which is where the core of our disagreement lies. Here is a question though: If a person can mentally divorce their spouse AFTER a legal divorce has taken place, why can’t a mental divorce take place BEFORE or altogether without a legal divorce? That’s only logical if civil law does not determine when a divorce/ putting away takes place.

The consequences of our brother’s statement alone should be sufficient enough proof to help us see the error in his and other mental divorce advocates’ teaching.

Now, to be clear, civil law does not define marriage - God does: *And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt. 19:4-6)*. God says marriage is a relationship between one man and one woman. Civil law also does not define what is an authorized marriage, divorce, or remarriage - God does. As we have stated repeatedly and will continue doing so, divorcing for the cause of fornication is the only authorized reason to

dissolve a marriage and then be able to remarry (**Matt. 19:9; etc.**). Lastly, civil law does not define nor dissolve the marriage bond - God does: *“For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man”* (**Rom. 7:2-3**). Only God establishes (binds) and looses the bond of marriage. Civil law does, however, establish when a marriage (not the bond) begins and ends. We saw that in **Rom. 7:2-3** and we’ll have more to say on marriage vs the marriage bond later.

God Recognizes the Actions of Civil Law

God does not authorize unscriptural marriages, but He still recognizes they exist as “marriages,” which proves civil law does factor into this discussion.

When John rebuked Herod for his unlawful relationship with Herodias, **Mark 6:17** still defines that relationship as a marriage: *“For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife; for he had married her.”* The marriage was unlawful, but God still recognized it as a marriage nonetheless (albeit one that needed to be terminated). This is significant because God did not authorize that marriage to begin; civil law did. Yet, God/the Holy Spirit/the writer of Mark still states that Herod and Herodias were “*married*,” telling us civil law does determine beginnings/endings of marriages. Again, civil law does not define marriage nor does it determine if a marriage is divinely authorized - only God does that - but civil law does establish when marriages begin/end. Put another way, civil law does not de-

termine the beginning/end of the marriage bond, but it does determine the beginning/end of a marriage.

Jesus’s specific choice of words tells us civil law factors into this discussion. For example, even though Jesus condemned unscriptural marriages, divorces, and remarriages, He still recognized them as marriages and divorces. We have referred to it several times, but let’s look at the passage again. **Matt. 19:9** says, *“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”* In this verse, we have an unscriptural putting away, which Jesus calls “*divorce*.” Did Jesus authorize the divorce of the two parties or did civil law? Civil Law. In this verse, we also have an unscriptural remarrying, which Jesus calls marriage (“*marries*”) Did Jesus authorize the remarriage or did civil law? Civil Law. Therefore, God recognizes the actions of civil law as it pertains to marriage, divorce, and remarriage. **He may not authorize what civil law does, but He still recognizes what has occurred.** A divorce or remarriage, then, are just that – divorce or remarriage.

Let’s repeat that just so we are clear: God does not authorize unscriptural divorces, but He still recognizes when they occur. Going back to **Matt. 5:32**, Jesus says, *“But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.”* The Lord recognizes when people put away their spouse even unscripturally. He says the person “*is*” divorced. Mental divorce advocates say no divorce has occurred, which is the exact opposite of what Jesus says! Mental divorce advocates also argue that man cannot separate because only God does that. However, **Matt. 19:6** reads, *“What God has*

joined together, let not man separate.” Not only is man capable of separating unjustly, God recognizes when man does unrightly separate/put asunder, and, obviously, Jesus would not say “let not man separate” if man is incapable of doing so. Man can separate; he cannot, however, loosen. The distinction between the two is found in the difference between “marriage” and the marriage “bond.”

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN MARRIAGE AND THE MARRIAGE BOND

We have defined marriage already as a unique relationship between one man and one woman, with only permitted reason for termination (**Matt. 19:4-9**). Now, let’s define the marriage “bond” by looking again at **Rom. 7:2-3**: “*For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.*” God’s general rule is that the marriage bond is for life. Divorce for the cause of fornication and death are the exceptions to this general rule. In this passage, we can see how the marriage bond continues even after an unscriptural divorce. Paul explains, “*if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress.*” As we have already proven, an unscriptural divorce is a real divorce recognized (while not authorized) by God. The problem comes when people try to equate the marriage with the bond and, likewise, equate divorce with necessarily loosening that bond. Yet, divorce does not automatically break the marriage bond, which shows that marriage and the marriage bond are separate and distinct from each other.

Rom. 7:2-3 proves the marriage and the bond are not equivalent when it gives the case of a woman that is bound to her first husband while also being married but not bound to a second husband. God recognizes the second marriage as a marriage (“*she marries another man*”), but He does not bind them together. The woman is still bound to her original husband, which is why a remarriage while the original husband is still alive makes her an adulteress. Therefore, the marriage and the bond are two different things. Divorce does not necessarily loosen the marriage bond. Only divorce for fornication does that, and only for the innocent party.

Mental divorce advocates contend that after a wrongful divorce of an unwilling mate, the couple are still married in the eyes of God. Yet, this assertion is clearly disproved by **Rom. 7:2-3**, as well as **1 Cor. 7:10-11**. Paul writes, “*Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.*” When a person wrongfully divorces an unwilling mate (that is what occurs in **1 Cor. 7:10-11**), God calls the divorced person “*unmarried.*” The person was once married, but after the unscriptural divorce has become unmarried due to civil law authorizing the deserting spouse’s actions. The couple are still bound but have become “*unmarried.*” Mental divorce advocates will say people who are unscripturally divorced cannot remarry because they are still married to one another. However, the reason people involved in unauthorized divorces are ineligible for remarriage is not because they are still married (**1 Cor. 7:10-11** and **Rom. 7:2-3** both disprove this argument), but because they are still bound. The marriage and the marriage bond are not interchangeable; they are distinct.

AN UNJUST PUNISHMENT?

A wrongfully divorced person is to “remain unmarried or be reconciled” to their spouse (**1 Cor. 7:11**). Mental divorce advocates argue it is NOT necessary to “remain unmarried” if the one who perpetrated the wrongful divorce later commits fornication after civil law finalizes the divorce. Many say the innocent party is wrongly punished - “it’s not fair.” AND TO THIS I WHOLEHEARTEDLY I AGREE!! IT’S NOT FAIR AT ALL!!! But this matter of fairness is not due to the fault of God nor is it the fault of any person standing for the truth on this subject; it’s man’s fault! Man is the one inflicting suffering on his spouse when he wrongfully separates what God has joined together.

The very people to whom Jesus spoke to in **Matt. 19** understood how difficult this law on marriage and divorce was/is. They stated, “*If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry*” (**Matt. 19:10**). To Jesus’s disciples, it was better not to marry than commit to such a law of permanency and a law with such difficult repercussions. No doubt, it is a hard truth to accept there only being one scriptural reason for divorce and one scriptural reason to make one eligible for remarriage. And, again, Paul told us exactly what to do if our spouse unscripturally divorces or separates from us: “*A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife*” (**1 Cor. 7:10-11**). This is not a recommendation, nor is there a third option to wait for the sinning party to commit fornication after already finalizing a divorce so a “mental divorce” can occur.

I am certainly not arguing that what I am teaching is easy, but neither did Jesus. Jesus explains, “*All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given . .*

. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it” (**Matt. 19:11-12**). Seemingly, the biggest hang-up preventing brethren from accepting the truth on this subject is the idea of the innocent party having to suffer. Those of us who deny the authority of mental divorce are accused of unnecessarily and unscripturally imposing celibacy on people, such as what is warned about in **1 Tim 4:1-3**. But we are not the ones imposing celibacy; it is the wrongfully divorcing partner inflicting this punishment. We just referenced **Matt. 19:11-12**, but Jesus’s words bear repeating in their full context: *All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother’s womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it”* (**Matt. 19:11-12**).

I wholeheartedly agree that we should never underestimate the suffering of people who have been unscripturally put away, but since when does the Bible support the idea that faithful servants of God won’t suffer? **1 Pet. 3:13-17** is clear: “*And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.’ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” Let’s take a brief walk through the Old Testament and talk about what was “fair.”*

- Was it “fair” to Abraham when God told him to offer his son, Isaac, whom he loved, as a sacrifice in **Gen. 22:2**? How did Abraham respond to this “unfair” command? *“They came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son” (Gen. 22:9-10).*
- Was it “fair” for the innocent baby conceived from the unlawful affair between David and Bathsheba to die for no fault of his own in 2 Sam. 12? How did David respond to this “unfair” judgment? *“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge” (Psalm 51:4, NIV).*
- Arguably, no one in the Old Testament was treated more “unfairly” than Job. Was it “fair” for God to allow Satan to cause Job immense suffering? How did Job respond to this “unfair” suffering after saying things he regretted? *“Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know . . . Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:3b-6).*

As if these examples are not enough to show us the error in thinking God does not expect us to obey “unfair” commands, consider our Lord. Was it “fair” that Jesus - the only sinless being in the history of the world - died because of my and your sins? Certainly not! Yet, here we are trying to justify pursuing the very things that caused our Lord to die, all as a matter of “fairness.” Shame on us!

Whether we want to believe/accept the truth or not, the Psalmist is right - *“The Lord’s precepts are fair” (Psalm 19:8, NET).* Man may treat his fellow man unfairly, but nothing God expects of us is unfair. Incidentally, this whole issue could actually be “unfair” if God still required an unjustly divorced person to remain “enslaved” to the spouse who divorces them (**1 Cor. 7:15, ESV**). But God does not require this. He, therefore, is not being “unfair” at all.

There is a big difference in fairness and easiness, and the Lord never promised that following Him would be easy; in fact, He said the opposite: *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).* Considering what our Lord endured for us on His cross, we ought to never think that anything God expects of us when carrying our own crosses “just doesn’t seem fair.”

IS THIS A FELLOWSHIP ISSUE?

I am not going to beat around the bush here. YES, this is a fellowship issue. But why is this a fellowship issue?

Those who support mental divorce are supporting people living in adulterous relationships and expect those who oppose mental divorce to be in fellowship with adulterers and those supporting adultery. They desire “unity in diversity,” which is unscriptural regardless of how much mental divorce advocates cite **Rom. 14** to claim we can still be in fellowship with adulterers. No amount of hiding behind **Rom. 14** changes the fact of the matter - that chapter has everything to do with matters of the conscience and those weak in the faith, while having absolutely nothing to do with doctrinal compromise. In fact, to apply **Rom. 14** to moral and doctrinal things is to say that we can receive ANYONE

off on any number of doctrinal points as long as the person in error:

- Is fully convinced in his own mind that nothing is wrong with what he is doing (v.5).
- Considers what he is doing to be clean [proper] (v.14).
- Has faith to self before God (v.22).
- Does it unto the Lord (v.6).
- Gives thanks to God for it (v.6).

In other words, we can be in fellowship with any and every person who is off any number of points, but is sincere in what they do. Sounds like something our denominational friends teach, doesn't it? Because it is!

The New Testament is abundantly clear about not having fellowship with those who practice such error. For instance, **1 Cor. 5:9-11** is plain: *"I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person."* A person who "mentally divorces" their spouse and remarries is sexually immoral – they are an adulterer. Disfellowship from such a person is REQUIRED.

Eph. 5:3-11 is also plain: *"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints . . . For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God . . . For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the*

Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them." Mental divorce advocates, instead of exposing fornicators and telling them they have lost their inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, tell them they do have an inheritance and they remain in fellowship with unfruitful works of darkness, expecting us to do the same.

There are people who advocate for mental divorce but do not practice it. We still cannot be in fellowship with them because of what **Rom. 1:32** teaches. Not only is it sinful to actively engage in acts of sexual immorality (**1:29**), which is what occurs during an adulterous relationship, but it is also a sin to not actively engage in such a sin yet support those who do: *"Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them"* (**1:32**). Similarly, **2 John 9-11** tells us, *"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds."* Let there be no doubt about it - this IS a fellowship issue.

CONCLUSION

As we conclude, let's revisit the issues we mentioned at the beginning of this article that cause division. The issues/questions are:

- Disagreement over what divorce means.
- How a person can become eligible for remarriage, which involves accepting/denying whether civil law matters, and understanding if a divorce/putting away

can occur after a legal (civil) divorce has occurred.

- Recognizing the distinction between “marriage” and the marriage “bond.”
- If mental divorce (mentally putting a spouse away after a civil divorce has already occurred) is not scriptural, this means God allows the innocent divorced party to be punished; how could He allow this?
- Is this a fellowship issue?

We asserted the scriptures provide clear and definitive answers to each of these points, and what does the Bible say on this matter?

- Divorce is the termination of a marriage.
- A person can only be eligible for remarriage if he divorces his spouse for fornication, or if the spouse dies.
- The decisions of civil law DO matter; a civil divorce is a real divorce recognized (although not authorized) by God. Therefore, a “mental divorce” after a civil divorce has already occurred is impossible. A person cannot “mentally divorce” his spouse after a civil divorce has already been finalized since God recognizes civil divorces as terminating the marriage.
- The marriage and the bond are distinct; they are not interchangeable since unscriptural divorces do not automatically end the marriage bond.
- God does not inflict suffering on an unjustly divorced spouse; the one who abandons his spouse inflicts the suffering. Are we willing to endure for righteousness sake?
- Beyond any shadow of doubt, this is a fellowship issue. To fellowship with those supporting “mental divorce” is to support adultery, which is condemned.

I plead with you - if you or someone you know is in a second marriage after having “mentally divorced” the first spouse, please understand the second marriage is unlawful; it is an adulterous marriage, and *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators . . . nor adulterers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-10)*. I beg all who are in adulterous relationships and all who falsely teach that the Bible authorizes “mental divorce” to repent by getting out of those unlawful relationships (**Mark 6:17**) and ceasing to spread this false doctrine which provides false hope to adulterers.

DID YOU KNOW?

If we are asked why something is a sin and our first impulse is to quote the Old Testament, we are likely guilty of putting an improper emphasis on the Old Law. Gal. 5:1 calls the Law of Moses a “yoke of bondage” we should not desire to be brought back under. Even worse, if we bind so much as one thing from the Law of Moses that is not stated/implicit in the New Testament, we lose our salvation: “Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing . . . You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:2-4). Now, to be clear, it is important to regularly study the Old Testament. Though we are under a different covenant today, God has preserved the Old Testament for a reason, but the Old Testament was written “for our learning” (Romans 15:4); it was not written for our law today. (DTS)

Dangerous Preaching

SEWELL HALL | GEORGIA, UNITED STATES
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A man who accepts the task of preaching the gospel accepts a dreadful responsibility. *“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1)*. Application of these words may not be limited to what we commonly term local preachers, but they apply in a special way to such men. The longer a man remains with a church, doing such work, the more responsible he becomes for the convictions and faithfulness of the members.

Brother, why do you preach? Is it a profession for you, simply a way of making a living? Is it a career that you wish to enhance by building up a large congregation? Is it an opportunity to exercise your artistic talents by producing a masterpiece of words each week? Is it the pride of having people praise your preaching for years without tiring of it? Preaching for these reasons may build reputations or even larger congregations but it will not produce godly, well-informed, and indoctrinated Christians. Preaching that is God approved is not for the advancement of the preacher but for the salvation and edification of the hearers. Note three examples of dangerous preaching.

PREACHING WHAT IS FALSE

The Old Testament is filled with warnings. Remember the *“man of God”* who died because he believed a false prophet’s lie (I **Kings 13**). Jesus warned, *“Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15)*. Peter echoed these words, predicting, *“There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive*

heresies” (II Peter 2:1). The danger of false teaching is recognized by most of us. But teaching does not have to be false to be dangerous. We have seen how the media can distort the news by reporting only selected facts. Those facts may be true but if they do not give the whole picture, false impressions are left. A mother may not feed her child poison, but if she does not give it the balanced diet it needs she may contribute to its sickness or even death.

PREACHING ONLY IN GENERALITIES

We may be pleased when someone says, *“You have made me eager to obey God in everything.”* Such words are encouraging, but we should not suppose that our job is done when this is said. Jeremiah’s countrymen said, *“Whether it is pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God” (Jer. 42:6)*. But when Jeremiah told them what God wanted them to do, they totally rejected it and called him a liar. It is our job, as it was Jeremiah’s, to show our hearers what God says they should do and not do. We need to be teaching what is wrong with profanity, dancing, drinking, immodesty, and other worldliness; as well as with the social gospel, instrumental music, Calvinism, denominationalism, institutionalism and other doctrinal errors. Preachers, how long has it been since you have preached on these important subjects? Elders, how long has it been since the flock for which you are responsible have been taught on such subjects as these? We may think that the congregation knows about these things, but how do they know? Even if the older members know, what about young people who did not hear

the old sermons of thirty years ago? It is a failure to continue preaching on such things that leaves a church open to worldliness and unscriptural innovations. My brother, Bill, has observed that churches vary in their feeling about sound doctrinal preaching. The first church does not want sound teaching and will avoid preachers they fear might produce it. The second church will accept sound teaching and appreciate it, but they do not demand it. The third church not only accepts sound teaching but will accept nothing short of it. However, those churches that will accept it but do not get it for a period of ten years will cease to want it.

PREACHING THAT IS LIMITED TO ATTACKS ON WORLDLINESS AND ERROR

It can kill a church. Recently, someone reported to me their periodic visits to a very small congregation of older Christians, and observed that every time they visited, the preacher was warning about some kind of apostasy that really does not threaten those faithful veterans. All Christians, young and old, need encouragement. The gospel is good news; the promises it makes and the hope it gives should be often stressed. The same passage (II Tim. 4:2) that calls upon evangelists to convince and rebuke also instructs them to exhort. Exhortation involves appeal, entreaty, encouragement, consolation and comfort (Vines). *“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all”* (I Thess. 5:14).

ON THE OTHER HAND . . .

Great preaching has always come from the heart of one who was passionate about the needs of his hearers and confident that God’s word is the solution to their needs. One of the temptations involved in preaching to the same congregation each Sunday is the

feeling that one must come up with something that is either new, or a novel presentation of what is old. The needs of the hearers may be forgotten. One may use scripture - even limit himself to expository preaching - yet not deal with the current needs of his audience.

Jeremiah rebuked the sins of his generation and warned them of future consequences until he was tempted to keep silent. *“But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones. And I was weary of holding it back, and I could not”* (Jer. 20:9). *“Someone has said that there are three kinds of preachers. The first has to say something - he is a paid talker who has to fill a certain amount of time each week. The second has something to say, and that is a whole lot better. But best of all is the third - the man who has something to say and has to say it. That is the kind of preacher Jeremiah was”* (L.A. Mott in Thinking Through Jeremiah). Each of us who preach should ask, *“What is the burning fire in my bones that I cannot hold back?”* If we do not have such a burning fire, or if it is something other than *“what is good for edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers”* (Eph. 4:29), then we had best quit preaching.

SWORD SWIPES

**“Shun profane and vain babblings”
(2 Tim. 2:16a, KJV)**

Pure and undefiled religion is sadly often forgotten.

“Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

(DTS)

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

“And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks” (Hebrews 11:4, ESV).

“Set Thine House in Order”

CHARLES G. MAPLES, SR.

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Many times we have planned, and made arrangements for expected guests, sometimes having weeks, or even months, to set things in order. But how many times have you suddenly learned that otherwise unexpected visitors are to arrive in a very short time? You rushed around to “set the house in order,” to tidy up things. Even if you manage to get things looking “decent,” chances are that you are not nearly so pleased to invite your guests in when they arrive, as when you had been forewarned earlier, and therefore had more time to “get ready.” **BUT THAT IS NOT THE HOUSE OF WHICH WE ASK!**

Although we cannot expect God to give us a special warning, as He did Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:1), He is, in His Word, warning us to set our spiritual house in order. He shows us what it means to be ushered into eternity, either prepared or unprepared, in **Luke 16**. Lazarus had made proper preparations, and was at rest “*in Abraham’s bosom*,” while the rich man had failed to “*make ready*,” and therefore awoke in flaming torment! So many of us have things “deranged” in our spiritual houses: envy, strife, bitterness, etc. have moved into our hearts, crowding out the “furnishings” of love, forgiveness, sober thinking, meekness, etc. still others, through unfaithfulness, indicate they are not really concerned about the appearance of their spiritual house. And, of course, there are so many, many others, some of whom will read this, who have made no preparation at all -

they have not obeyed the gospel of our Saviour! (see **2 Thess. 1:7-9**).

Stop! Take a good look at your spiritual house. The Lord will return without warning, other than found in His word, and then you will find that it is too late to “straighten up things!” Have you obeyed the gospel? Are YOU living faithfully to Christ? Would you be happy to have Christ come and find your house in its present condition? If not, then why do you wait? “*Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live.*” Do it now!

MYTH BUSTERS

**“They will turn away their ears from the truth & will turn aside to myths”
(2 Tim. 4:4, NASB)**

An old saying goes, “Money is the root of all evil.” But, actually, it’s the love of money that is the root of all evil - “*For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*” (1 Tim. 6:10, KJV). Money is not inherently evil; we just have a way of desiring it in such a way that is evil and often use it to fulfill our evil desires.

(DTS)

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**“BUT WHEN THEY BELIEVED PHILIP AS HE PREACHED GOOD NEWS
ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST,
THEY WERE BAPTIZED, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN.”**

ACTS 8:12, ESV

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